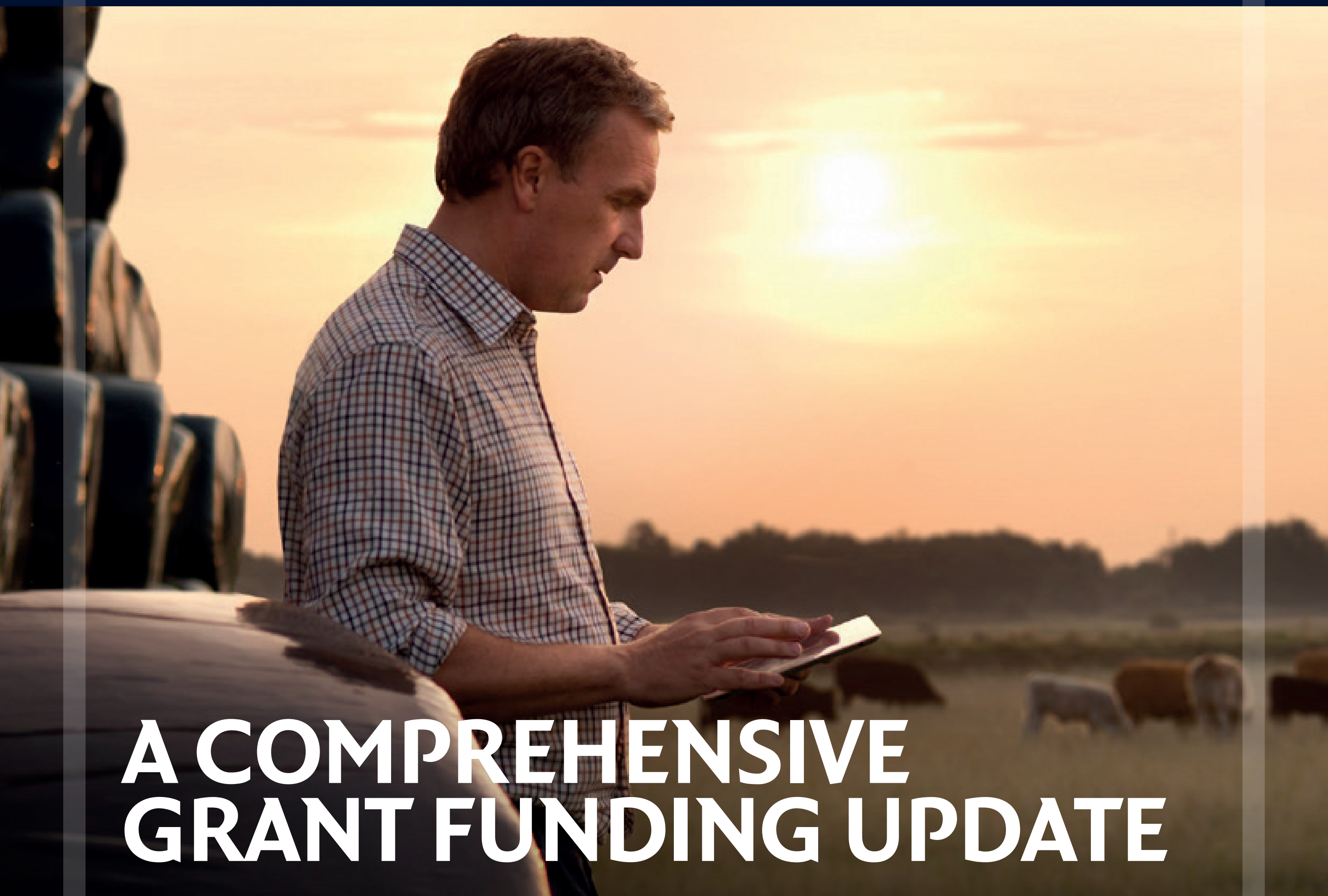
CHEFFINS

RURAL

ISSUE 21 SCENE WINTER 2020



A COMPREHENSIVE GRANT FUNDING UPDATE

The transition from EU to UK-funded grant schemes

Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CS)

Countryside Stewardship (CS) is the first of the funding schemes to be made available under post-Brexit domestic legislation. DEFRA has heralded this as an opportunity to move away from the current control regime focused on penalties and towards a more positive approach to delivering environmental outcomes. It promises fewer payment recoveries and penalties as well as better guidance and communication.

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One of the key points of these new domestically-funded agreements is that they now offer a break clause, allowing participants to come out of CS at an agreed annual break point, without penalty, but only once they have secured a place in the new Environmental Land Management scheme (ELM). Whilst the new ELM scheme is not fully available until 2024, this forward-looking approach means farmers can sign up to new CS agreements knowing they won't be caught in a potentially less advantageous position. We have found that this greater flexibility and a marked shift away from a penalty-driven scheme has attracted a steady stream of new applicants into CS this year.

Farmers who are already signed up to Environmental Stewardship or Countryside Stewardship will be offered one-year rolling extensions to their agreements as and when they expire, with the government hoping to bridge the gap between the old schemes and the new. Ministers are keen to see a seamless transition from the old funding regime which means there will naturally be a period of time in which both old and new schemes operate.

With the ability to provide farmers with substantial levels of both annual and capital grant funding, the CS is still an attractive way to boost farm income and in its new guise as a lead-in to ELM, we are encouraging clients to make the most of the opportunities currently on offer. New Countryside Stewardship agreements will continue to be available until 2023 with the next application window due in spring 2021.

The Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI)

Secretary of State, George Eustice, first hinted during his address to the 2020 NFU Conference in February to a shift in the government's approach to rolling out the new ELM policy. The first, or lower tier, of what will be the ELM scheme was rebranded by George Eustice as the Sustainable Farming Incentive, described as 'designed to be open to any farmer to incentivise participation in whole-farm measures such as integrated pest management, sensitive hedgerow management and soil health.'

Latest reports show that the SFI will become available to farmers prior to the main ELM scheme, possibly as soon as 2022, to act as a 'stepping-stone', supporting farm incomes as BPS payments start to fall away during the crucial 2021-2024 transition period.

Many farmers will be relieved at the news that a simpler and more inclusive scheme will help them in the protracted move from CAP subsidies to ELM payments. However, there are concerns it could divert time and resources away from the full implementation of ELMs, and environmentalists have warned it should not deter from the more ambitious environmental, climate and biodiversity actions that have been pledged in the 25 Year Environment Plan and under Michael Gove's familiar 'public money for public goods' mantra.

An announcement describing the transition process in more detail is expected as we head towards the end of the year and at Cheffins we will be ready to offer professional advice for any clients looking to make the most of the new SFI funding.

Grant schemes to support investment

As part of its new support package, DEFRA will make a first round of grants available to farmers in 2021 for measures to improve efficiency. This could involve helping to focus on investments to reduce costs, improve yields and increase returns. Similar to the RDPE Countryside Productivity fund, it will also support producers who want to process and add value to their products, create new products or sell their products directly to customers.

There will be opportunities to apply for grants for both smaller and larger investments. Smaller grants will be available for equipment, technology and small infrastructure investments from a pre-determined list of items in a similar way to the Countryside Productivity Small Grant Scheme. Larger grants will offer the potential to bring about transformational improvements to business performance, for example, with food processing equipment or robotic systems.

We are encouraged to see that DEFRA will be looking to carry forward their own version of these grant funding schemes which have been incredibly successful in driving up the productivity of our region's rural businesses. The new grant schemes will be organised into a series of application rounds and we expect more detail to emerge as we draw closer to the scheme launch next year.

For further information on grant funding, please contact the Cheffins Rural Professionals team.

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Farmland supply at all-time low allowing values to ride the wave of global pandemic

Rural land values have traditionally weathered economic uncertainty better than other asset classes, and this year has proven no different, where a record-breaking lack of supply over a prolonged period, coupled with rising demand has kept prices high throughout all sectors of the market.

The coronavirus outbreak has undoubtedly had an impact on the land market. Farms and farmland which would have been offered to the market in spring were put on hold, only to be brought to the market in the summer months and these were quickly snapped up by the most active buyers in the market. In fact, in the first six months of this year, nearly fifty per cent of the land available only hit the open market in June and this chronic lack of stock only went to exacerbate buyers' frustrations when looking for opportunities.

When it comes to values, these continue to be wide ranging in East Anglia, however few sales have dropped below the £8,000-per acre level this year as competitive bidding and high levels of demand kept prices high. A recent sale on the Cambridgeshire-Hertfordshire border saw values at the £8,500-mark for good quality agricultural land, however in the Fens, values have been ranging from £7,500 - £9,500 per acre depending on the availability of irrigation and local demand. Two sales of land situated on the edge of settlements north of Cambridge saw values hit £11,375 per acre and £11,770 per acre at public auction, in contrast with a recent private sale of Grade 1 agricultural land in the Fens which achieved £9,000 per acre.

But the question is, who is buying? The majority of buyers tend to be local or neighbouring farmers together with larger agri-business and commercial farmers who are looking to scale up and expand their holdings. Lifestyle buyers have also increased since the start of the pandemic, particularly those looking for small parcels of land which may offer alternative income streams, or simply as somewhere to 'get away from it all.' Investors and developers have also been turning their attention to the farmland market. Pension and private equity funds are now competing with property developers for land in key strategic locations and are looking to capitalise on the government's plan to hit its target of building 300,000 new homes per year. We are still also seeing investors acquiring agricultural land in order to take advantage of its relatively favourable tax regime.

We forecast that as the future direction of the UK Agricultural Policy becomes clearer, there will be more land available to purchase as smaller farming businesses take stock and start to feel the squeeze financially. Uncertainty around subsidies and trade negotiations, coupled with pressures to diversify will likely bring with them a change in direction for many when it comes to succession or business planning. With this in mind, it could be prudent for farmers to take the opportunity to cash-in on their asset sooner rather than later in order to sell into a constrained market and generate the highest price possible.

For advice on buying or selling land please contact the Cheffins Rural Professionals team.

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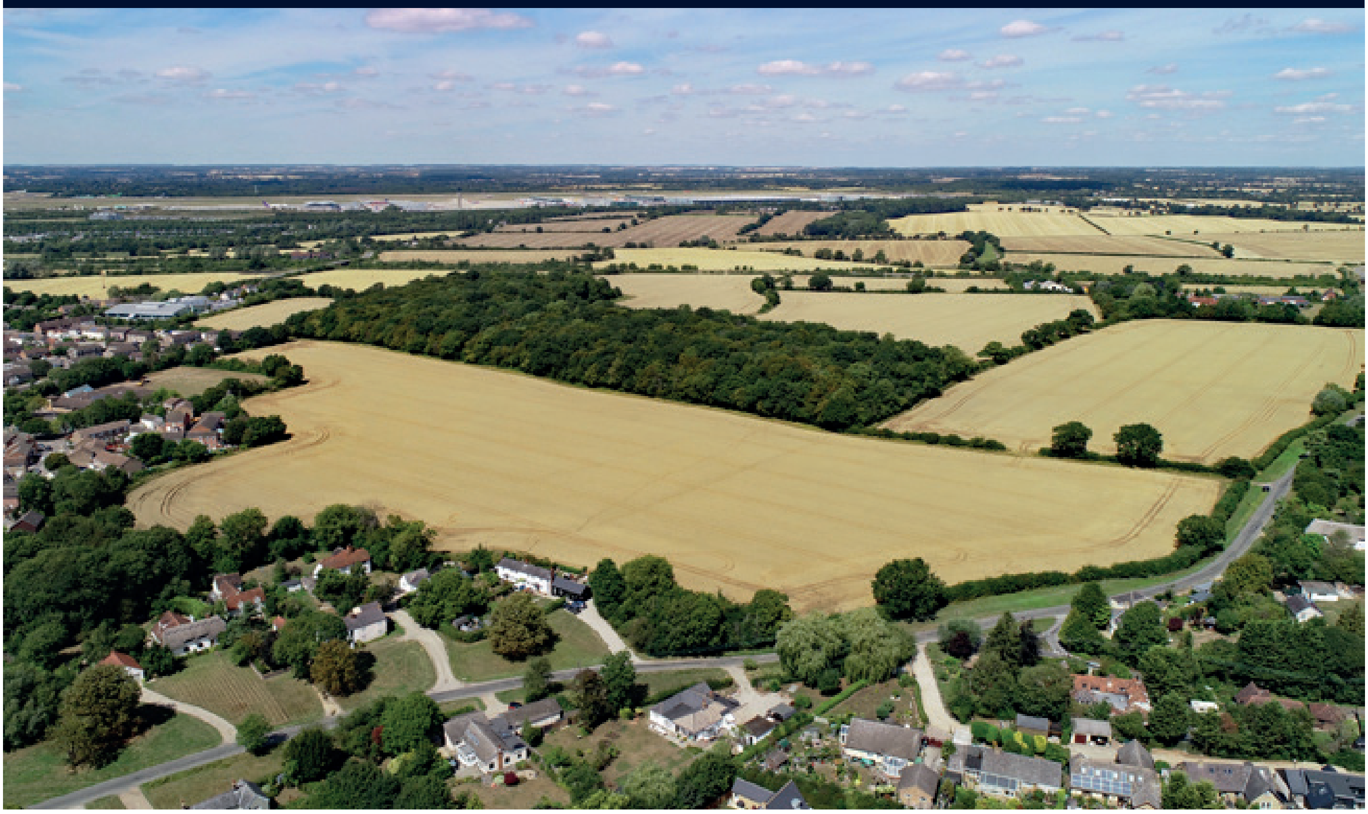

Norfolk Farmer diversifies into essential oils and beats the harvest 2020 slump

With 2020 reported as one of the worst harvests in the past twenty years, one Norfolk family farm has avoided the slump in yields with their business producing and distilling essential oils.

Selling essential oils to the likes of The Body Shop, Ken Goodger and his family grow chamomile, clary sage, hemp, hyssop, yarrow, peppermint, angelica and lovage at their Norfolk County Council Farm. The Goodgers are one of the only farmers in the UK to have their own purpose-built steam distillation plant, the product of which is used in perfume, body products and medicines.

It all started when the family were approached by Norfolk County Council to trial growing herbs back in the 1990s.

Ken Goodger said: "We started off with a trial plot of chamomile back in 1996 which quite frankly didn't work at all. We didn't have the right equipment and the bales of crop we created were far too big for the still, however I could see the potential in the business and decided to push forward with production. At the beginning, we only had five acres set aside for herb growing, however we now have around 100, and the business has grown faster than I possibly could have expected. It took a couple of years for the crop to really start to take and our challenge is always the British weather, however this year's hot summer really did us some favours and yields across a number of the herbs are stronger than previous years. We start distilling the crop around the middle of June and it is ready for shipping out from the middle of September. We sell to both wholesalers and end users, with shipments going to New Zealand, Australia, Thailand, Taiwan, China, the Americas and throughout Europe.

We also distil products for third parties who don't have their own equipment, and this has also become a significant strand of the business with lavender and lovage coming to us from across the country to be distilled down. Similarly, we work with a team of other local farmers who each have put a proportion of their farm into aromatic herbs which they then bring to our distillery which helps us ensure quality across all of the products."

As the business went from strength to strength, the Goodger family employed Cheffins to make a Rural Development Programme for England Business Development grant application to allow for major expansion of the business, with the plan to increase turnover to over £450,000 per year. Awarded with 40 per cent of the entire project cost, the Goodger family were granted £97,000 to double the capacity and quantity of essential oils which could be produced. The grant allowed the farm to install two new oil distillation vats; create a drive over conditioning floor for harvested crops which improved the quality of the final product and minimised overheating and product deterioration and to create a clean room for storing oils and ensuring the best possible end product.

The Goodgers are the most diverse provider of essential oils in the UK and this has allowed them to weather the storm of decreased yields across traditional crops this harvest. Before embarking on expansion and the award of the grant, the Norfolk Essential Oils business was struggling to keep up with demand, particularly as the some of their largest wholesale customers looked to scale up their requirements.

Ken and his family are now able to supply some of the biggest wholesalers of these products to the cosmetic, food, flavour and fragrance and health and wellness industries. Whilst there are a series of hoops to jump through for a successful grant application, examples such as Ken Goodger go to prove how this funding can really make a difference to diversifying businesses. Whilst a combination of a poor harvest, COVID and lengthy Brexit negotiations have all hit farmers hard over the past year, Norfolk Essential Oils has bucked the trend with sales remaining firm.

Ken Goodger continues "The perfume market has been hit hard by COVID, both because of the lack of sales through duty free and also on the high street and this did have a knock-on effect on demand. However, I do think this is short-lived and business has picked up in the past couple of months with both wholesalers and end users. In fact, we have never been so busy, the phones have been ringing off the hook. COVID complications with export have also slowed us down slightly, however there is always a way around these things and we actually have a large shipment of products about to leave the yard for Taiwan and China."

Ken runs the Norfolk Essential Oils business with his wife Debra, son Sean and daughter Kim. Norfolk Essential Oils also sell floral water and aromatherapy gifts. **www.neoils.com**

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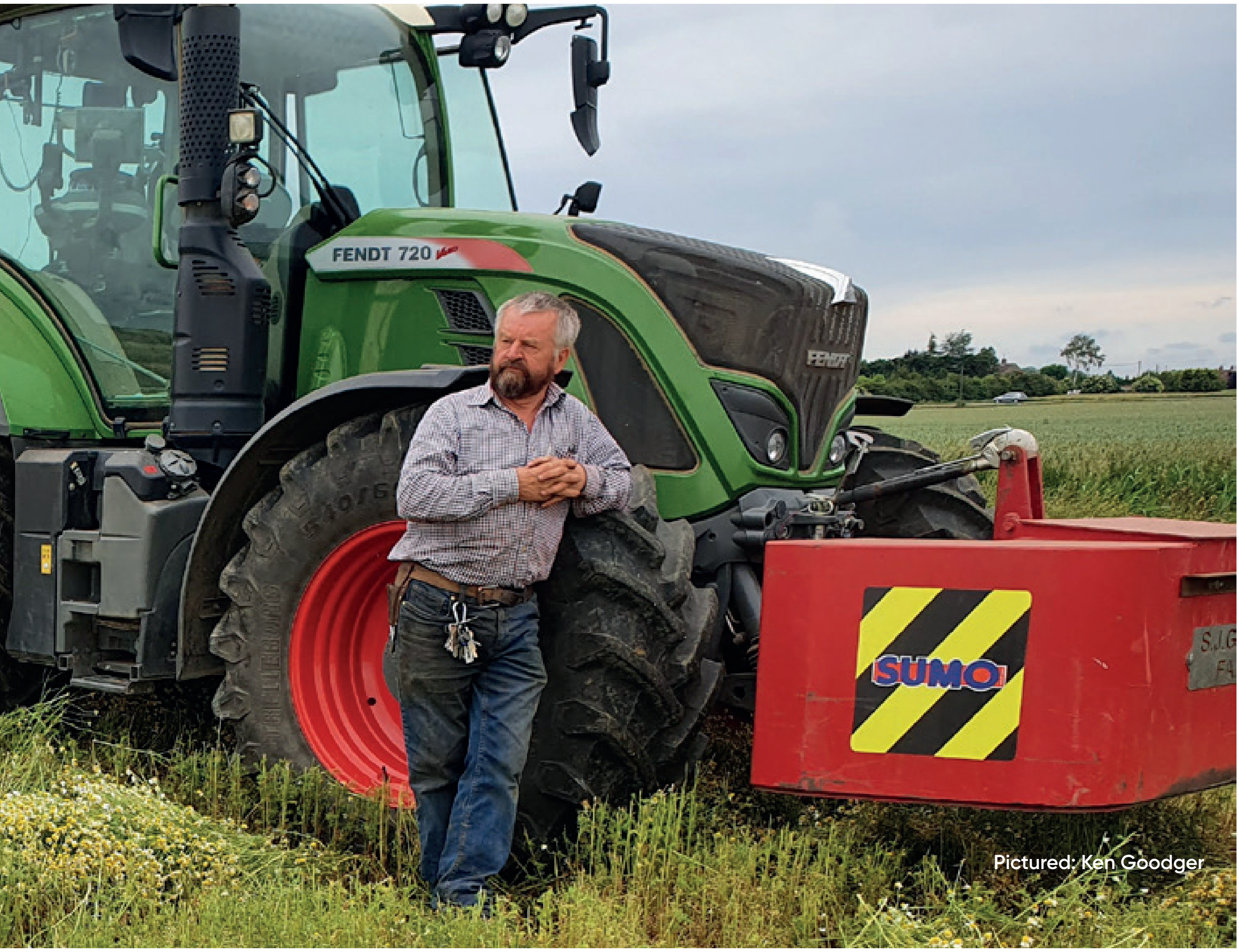

Pictured: Ken Goodger

Biodiversity Net Gain – what is it and how can landowners get involved?

Billed as a method to address the loss of habitat and biodiversity as a result of new developments, Biodiversity Net Gain is gathering traction across our industry since its launch by the government under its 25-year Environment Plan.

Whilst similar approaches have been used for many years, they will soon become an integral part of the planning process when legislative changes are enshrined in the Environment Bill in the near future. Put simply, the policy will be a mandatory requirement for developers to demonstrate a minimum 10 per cent of 'net gain' in biodiversity following a new development, which will be measured and implemented using a common system of metrics to ensure a level playing field across the UK.

The new mandate for Biodiversity Net Gain will automatically apply to larger developments where planning permission from a Local Planning Authority (LPA) is required, whereas on smaller development sites, LPAs will unquestionably look to achieve biodiversity gains within the site itself.

The Eastern region is widely acknowledged as one of the fastest growing parts of the UK with the coming decades set to see significant housing, infrastructure and commercial development. In anticipation of this, the Greater Cambridge Local Plan has embedded within it the core principle of ensuring that future development is conducted in a way that is sustainable and that can enhance the natural environment for the people living in and around it. East Cambridgeshire District Council, meanwhile, has produced a Supplementary Planning Document which will support the Council's position in relation to the recently adopted Local Nature Partnership vision to 'double land for nature' by 2050 across Cambridgeshire.

From a housebuilders' perspective, understanding the baseline position of a potential development site will enable clear thinking around what the potential losses in biodiversity might be, how these features might be protected and enhanced to achieve Biodiversity Net Gain on-site and, failing that, the type of off-site provision that might be required. For some developments, providing off-site biodiversity gain will offer the most effective solution, and in these instances local farmers and landowners will be well-positioned to provide this new 'habitat creation' service. In such cases, landowners can expect to be in demand to provide compensation sites which are strategically located and can provide the right level of uplift in biodiversity gain across a long-term period, typically 25 to 30 years. This undoubtedly presents opportunities for farmers and landowners who may be able to offer suitable sites.

The off-set site will need to fit with the requirements particular to the development it is partnering with, with schemes potentially involving habitat creation for species-rich grassland, woodland planting or wetland, for example. There will be a balance between choosing a site that can provide the optimum level of biodiversity 'uplift' and making sure the land is marginal enough to be sacrificed for such long-term environmental measures. Consideration will also need to be given to any wider implications on the farm business, for example future support payments and tax liabilities.

Those landowners who can identify a suitable site, which in many cases need only be a few acres, could secure significant financial gains under a long-term contract to first create and then undertake ongoing establishment of the wildlife habitat. Payments will typically allow a capital sum for establishment followed by an annual sum which is drawn down from a ring-fenced fund to manage the site to an agreed standard.

Payments are negotiated on a site-by-site basis and depend upon numerous variables calculated using DEFRA's Biodiversity Metric. Early indications, however, are that the financial incentives offered by Biodiversity Net Gain can be more favourable than those offered under current government schemes where habitat creation is incentivised, such as Countryside Stewardship.

The introduction of Biodiversity Net Gain into our planning system risks bringing additional cost to developers but conversely it should also bring with it the certainty of a standardised approach. It will promote the principles of sustainable development which, in an area undergoing rapid growth, exist to benefit all of us by ensuring our region remains a healthy and attractive place to live.

Amongst the drive towards economic growth in the Eastern region, farmers and landowners are poised to provide the solution in balancing out the competing needs of homes versus a healthy environment.

If you wish to discuss Biodiversity Net Gain or register your interest either as a landowner or a developer, please contact Katie Hilton (landowners) or Jon Jennings (developers).

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Growth in countryside trespass during the COVID-19 pandemic – how can landowners protect their interests?

As the COVID-19 pandemic brought with it a significant growth in walking and country pursuits, landowners are finding an increase in issues with trespass across their holdings. At Cheffins we have been advising clients on how to protect their land, manage the growing numbers of walkers and ramblers and how to ensure that no new Public Rights of Way are established.

Whilst walkers, cyclists and horse-riders might currently not be doing any harm, new official Public Rights of Way have a potential to be created, especially if a certain route has been used in excess of 20 years. These can be problematic for landowners due to potential liability should someone injure themselves on the land; maintenance liabilities of keeping paths clear and potential health and safety and security risks should a route cross a farmyard or busy working areas. Also, landowners should be aware that once a new Public Right of Way has been created, it can be particularly difficult for it to be removed.

The best way to deal with this issue is to make a 'deposit' under Section 31 (6) of the Highways Act (1980). The first step is to draw up a statement and a landownership plan showing any existing Public Rights of Way, which is then submitted to the Local Council. This is then followed by a declaration being submitted, which details the location of any existing Public Rights of Way and that no new rights are being granted. It is important to note that this is not a retrospective application, rather the deposit will protect the landowner from any new Public Rights of Way being claimed in the future by the public. It will not prevent claims from being made for new Public Rights of Ways used before the deposit was made, unless another deposit was already in existence.

It is essential for landowners to appreciate that these deposits only give protection for a 20-year period, therefore a part of good estate management is regular reviews of existing deposits and any potential new ones which need to be created.

The making of a Section 31 (6) deposit can be a complex but certainly worthwhile process and we would recommend seeking professional guidance from an agent or lawyer. Anyone looking for advice on this should contact the Cheffins Rural Professionals team.

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Farmland at auction snapped up as lack of stock drives prices

The auction room has long been an indicator of growth in land values and the past 12 months has been no different with prices largely holding firm at an average of around £9,000 per acre for farmland lots. Whilst uncertainty around farming subsidies had the potential to constrict values, lack of stock throughout 2019 and the first half of 2020 has led to increased appetite from a range of buyers for farmland at all levels, which has been illustrated by the 100 per cent sale rate for all land lots in the Cheffins Property Auction in both July and September. Buyers are now competing for the best farmland lots to hit the auction room, with rivalry between farmers, amenity buyers, property developers and investors all looking to snap up everything from smaller land parcels to larger agricultural holdings. Previous years have seen a steady supply of farmland in regional auction rooms and via private treaty, however supply has dropped off in recent months and we have seen a direct correlation between lack of stock and the competition faced at auction for the best lots pushing up prices.

The sale of farmland in strategic locations with the potential for redevelopment has increasingly presented an opportunity for farmers to release capital quickly, often whilst having

'...landowners should be aware that once a new Public Right of Way has been created, it can be particularly difficult for it to be removed.'

minimal impact on their farming operation and these types of lots always sell well at auction. As an example, in the Cheffins September property auction, 13.68 acres of Grade 2 arable land on the edge of the village of Doddington, near March in Cambridgeshire, sold for £161,000, well over its £100,000 estimate. Situated on the edge of the village and with road frontage, this was the type of lot which saw interest from developers and speculators, as well as traditional agricultural buyers, eventually selling to an investor buyer. Similarly, the July auction saw eight acres of strategic land on the edge of the A10 at Stretham sell for £91,000, representing values of over £11,000 per acre, and well above its £60,000 guide price to a local buyer.

However, not all land lots recently have sold to developers with deep pockets, traditional farmer buyers are still very much on the hunt to increase their land holdings and we have seen a prevailing confidence from this sector despite wider uncertainties on the horizon. The July sale saw 15.93 acres in Necton, near Swaffham in Norfolk, sell for £157,000, well over the upper guide price of £130,000, to a local farmer who fought off competition from online and telephone bidders.

On the other end of the scale, 3.66 acres of arable land close to Wisbech offered in the September sale generated a large amount of interest from local farmers and amenity buyers. Presenting more of a traditional agricultural parcel, of a manageable size, the land sold for £52,500, over double its lower estimate of £25,000, to a local buyer, likely for amenity purposes.

Farmland can be difficult to price, partly due to the levels of legal and practical issues which arise when it comes to the market, so the auction room offers landowners a very real opportunity to achieve high values with lower legal fees and less hassle in a completely transparent transaction. As a result, regional auction rooms are coming into their own as an easy go-to method to dispose of surplus acres, particularly for those looking to release capital fast, which we foresee could increase in regularity as farming incomes look uncertain due to Brexit.

Should you be considering selling farmland, amenity land or rural property via auction, please feel free to contact our team.

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On site sales buoyant as farmers dispose of unwanted machinery

The Cheffins on site sales team has seen unprecedented activity levels for both modern and vintage on-farm sales throughout 2020. With over 20 onsite sales taking place in the year until October and over £6.8 million-worth of machinery sold, auctions have taken place across the UK including in Somerset, Lincolnshire, Lancashire, Bedfordshire, Greater London and throughout the Eastern region. Social distancing measures as a result of the coronavirus pandemic have also led to a significant uptick in the number of timed online sales we've hosted. These sales have proved as effective for sellers as traditional live auctions and helped to ensure a consistent level of second-hand machinery being offered to the market.

Uncertainty around the agricultural industry and a disappointing harvest, have seen many farmers look to dispose of unwanted kit as part of their forward planning. This, combined with the growth of the larger contract farming businesses, has ensured a reliable level of supply and demand throughout the year, helping to keep prices firm for the best machinery on offer.

"The KS Coles Ltd sale in Somerset… where good quality and well maintained tractors achieved six figure prices…"

A good example of this was the KS Coles Ltd sale in Somerset in September, where good quality and well-maintained tractors achieved six figure prices across some 600 lots on offer. It can be expected that as the Agriculture Bill finally gets ironed out and the future of subsidies becomes clearer that we may well see an increase in dispersal sales, however with sterling still weak against the Euro, we would expect to see prices remain firm as European markets look to make the most of the quality second-hand machinery available.

As for our vintage auctions, appetite remains undiminished. We have seen that both through our regular sales at The Cambridge Machinery sale ground and also our on site sales, vintage and classic tractors are continuing to make vast sums at auction. At the Malcolm Beaton collection in Somerset in October, over 70 classic County, Ford and Roadless tractors were sold for figures well into the tens of thousands, with the highlight being a 1979 County 1474 'Short Nose' which achieved £74,000. Buyers for vintage and classic tractors continue to be both domestic and overseas collectors and enthusiasts, with bids from all over Europe being submitted at the Beaton sale. The Cambridge Vintage Sale in July also saw some spectacular prices paid, such as £70,250 for an MB Trac 1100 tractor, dating back to 1990. We forecast that values will continue to grow within the vintage and classic market, especially in the pre-1920s and post-1980s brackets which appear to currently have the most active buyer base.

If you're looking for advice on either modern or vintage machinery, please contact the Cheffins Machinery team.

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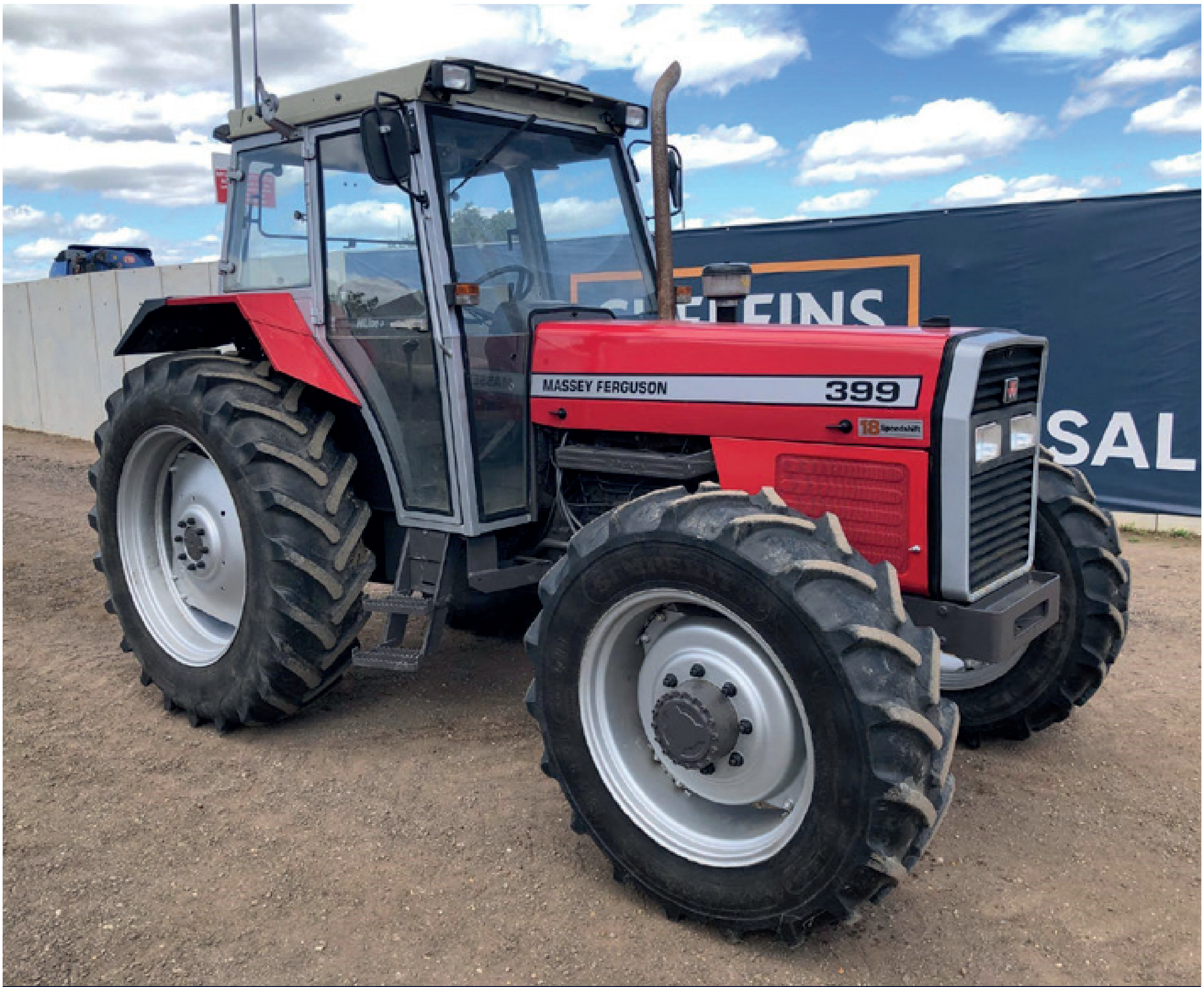

Cambridge Machinery Sales sees steady demand via both online and live auctions

Our monthly machinery sale has seen steady demand for second-hand equipment from both domestic and overseas buyers throughout the coronavirus pandemic, with a total of over £19 million-worth of equipment sold since March. There was a pause in live auctions at the start of the COVID-19 outbreak, meaning that sales were offered solely online until September when we reopened the gates of the sale ground. However, we were gladdened by the spirit of online bidding throughout the summer months which still saw excellent prices paid for second-hand tractors and plant items. In fact, the online-only sales had parity to live auctions in terms of totals generated throughout the summer months.

The September and October machinery sales grossed over £7.6 million combined, indicating the demand for good quality second-hand kit from across the world. Against a backdrop of uncertainty around farm subsidies and questions over export and trade in the post-Brexit transitional months, we have seen that both dealers and end-users are still coming to the Cheffins sales to snap up the best equipment on offer. Similarly, the outbreak of COVID-19 had little effect on the export market, with sales to over 100 different countries across Europe, the Middle East and Asia. Some of the strongest markets in recent months have been Spain and Germany for the newer tractors and plant machinery on offer, whereas the Sudanese market has made a comeback this year and has been a driver in the high prices paid for some of the older tractors, Massey Fergusons in particular.

As always, we are looking for new stock in each section of the sale and would like to reassure all of our vendors that it is 'business as usual' with COVID-secure guidelines in place for all of our auctions. Do get in touch with a member of the team if you would like to discuss buying or selling any used machinery via our monthly auction.

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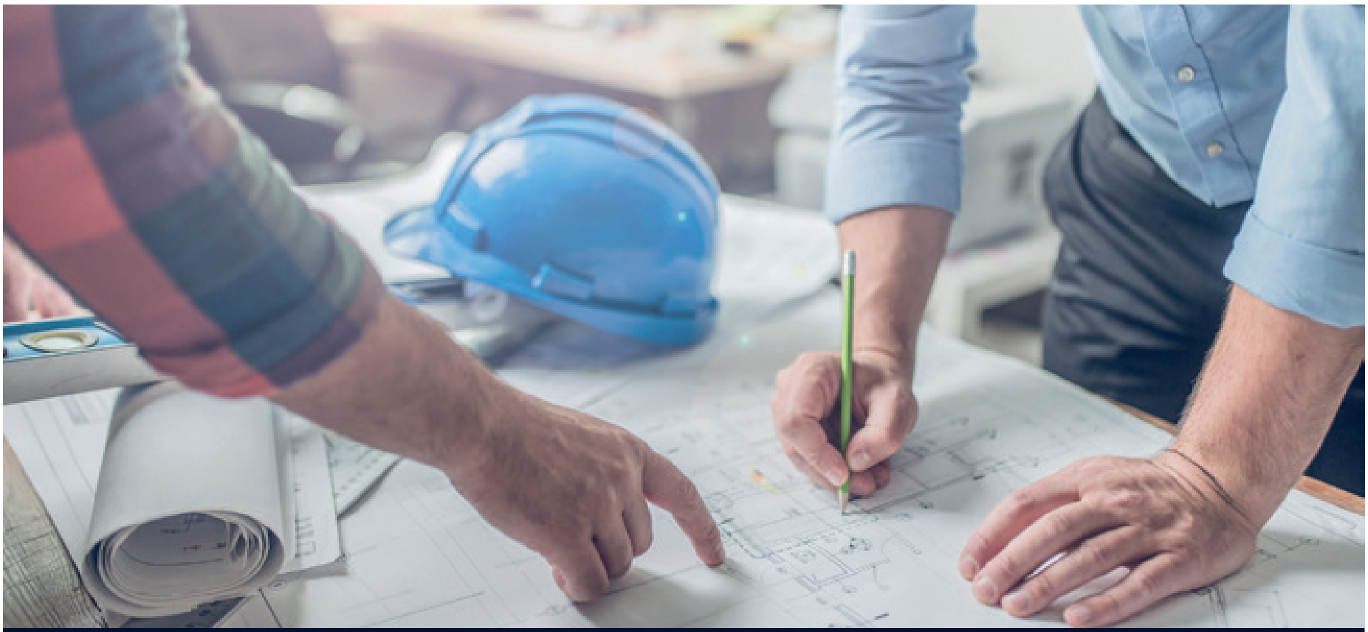

Planning permissions to be extended following COVID-19 pandemic as construction industry looks to make up lost ground

According to housing-supply figures from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the second quarter of 2020 saw the lowest number of new-build homes started or completed in England since records began in 2000. This is the result of the pause in activity by the construction industry from the 23rd March onwards and also the expiration of planning permissions during the period. Consequently, there has been pressure put upon the Government to make changes to legislation to allow the life of a planning permission due to expire during lockdown to be extended, particularly as this follows years of sustained growth in housing delivery.

As the majority of building projects, large or small, were halted from the start of the first national lockdown for a number of weeks, many applicants will have missed the window to start works, and as such, are at risk of the planning permission expiring. In response to this issue, the government has published the Business and Planning Act 2020, which introduces provisions to extend certain planning permissions which have recently expired or are due to expire this year.

The provisions took effect on 19th August 2020 and will expire on 1st May 2021 unless the Secretary of State substitutes a later date through regulations due to Covid-19. The guidance now states that local planning authorities 'should work constructively' with applicants to provide written confirmation of (planning) extensions 'as quickly as possible.'

So, which planning permissions does this apply to? According to the government guidance they are as follows:

- Unimplemented planning permissions with time limits for implementation which were due to lapse between 19th August 2020 (when the provisions came into force) and 31 December 2020 are extended to 1st May 2021. This happens automatically, with no requirement to obtain Additional Environmental Approval.
- Unimplemented planning permissions with time limits for implementation which passed between 23rd March 2020 (start of lockdown) and 19th August 2020 are also restored, and the time limit extended to 1st May 2021, subject to Additional Environmental Approval being granted. The purpose of the additional Environmental Approval is to establish whether Screening Opinions, Environmental Impact Assessments or Habitats Regulation Assessments are required and, if so, whether the previous Screening Opinion, Environmental Impact Assessment or Habitats Regulations Assessment remains up to date.
- Listed building consents - All listed building consents granted or deemed granted in relation to buildings in England subject to conditions requiring works to be begun by a date falling within the period from 23rd March 2020 to 31st December 2020 are extended until 1st May 2021.

Findings from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government show that the number of dwellings where building work has started on site was 15,930 in April to June 2020. This is down by 52 per cent when compared with the last quarter and this steep fall in activity reflects UK government COVID-19 lockdown measures. The number of dwellings completed on site was 15,950 in April to June 2020. This is down 62 per cent when compared with the last quarter and following on from the 5 per cent decrease in the previous quarterly change, this represents a steep fall in delivery. This calls into question whether the extensions to permissions should be extended further than 1st May 2021 or what other regulations will be rolled out to help the house building industry.

Anyone looking for further advice on this should contact the Cheffins Planning & Development team.

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The Planning White Paper 2020 – a new 'top down' approach to housing requirements from Whitehall

The government's new planning white paper is proposing to retain the Housing Delivery Test, which, in broad terms, is Whitehall's assessment of whether local planning authorities are ensuring enough new homes are built within their given area. Of importance is that the white paper now proposes a binding standard method of establishing housing requirement figures which would be set at a national level. This may prevent the current manipulation and different interpretations that Local Planning Authorities use to demonstrate whether they have a deliverable housing land supply. This 'top down' approach to housing requirements will represent a more controlled means of distributing the national housebuilding target of 300,000 new homes per year, and one million homes by the end of 2024.

Contrary to some reports, these changes are not a free for all and the existing protection for the Green Belt would remain. Of particular relevance for Cambridgeshire, it is likely that the Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough will oversee the strategic distribution of numbers. This ought to ensure that housing is not unfairly weighted in one area of the county, rather that it is spread evenly throughout the combined areas, with attention paid to local services, access to main road networks and so on.

The reason that the white paper proposes to retain the Housing Delivery Test and the presumption in favour of sustainable development, is because the Government has recognised that having enough land supply on its own does not guarantee the delivery of homes. This aspect of the white paper should represent a warning to many local authorities who have granted applications and allocated sites which for many reasons will not be delivered quickly, such as abnormal infrastructure costs, agreeing and signing legal agreements and subsequent amendments to planning applications.

Allied to the above, the five-year housing land supply requirement would also be retained, which will demonstrate via an Annual Monitoring Report, the Councils' projections for future delivery of sites. This will need to be underpinned by evidence to demonstrate how they have calculated delivery of the sites they have included within the Report.

It will be interesting to see whether all of this is actually achievable, especially as the white paper is currently subject to consultation and may take some time to enter the statute books. However, it demonstrates a commitment to delivering houses and finally meeting the 300,000 dwellings per year objective. Whilst the changes proposed by the white paper are encouraging, care needs to be taken to ensure that the proposals are not watered down and that there are proper penalties for Councils which do not deliver sufficient housing and are remiss in producing an up to date local plan.

For more information on the new planning white paper or the Housing Delivery Test, please do not hesitate to contact one of the Cheffins Planning & Development team.

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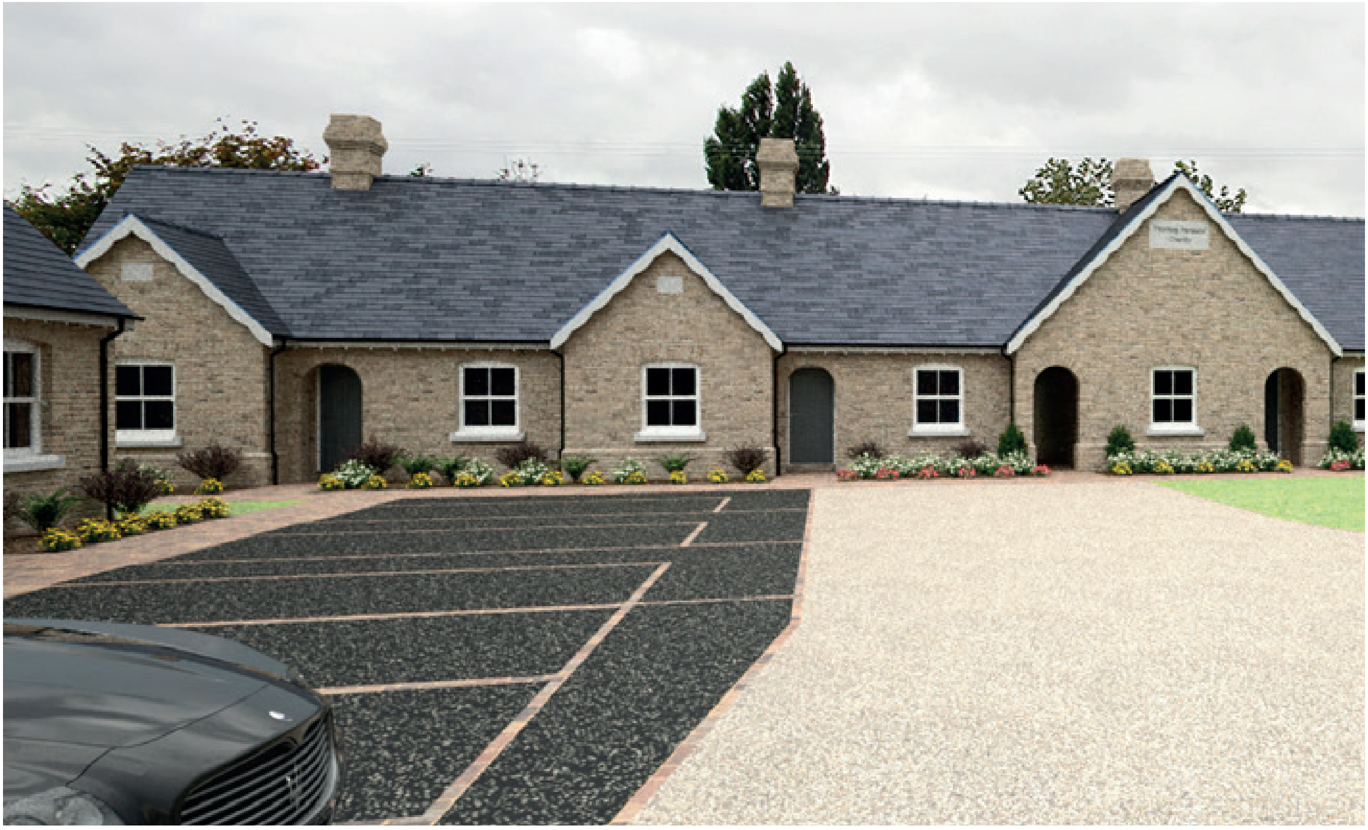
Cheffins manages major relocation project on behalf of long-standing client, Thomas Parsons Charity



Thomas Parsons Charity, based in Ely, and a long-standing client of Cheffins, has been granted planning permission to build nine purpose-built almshouses for residents on land the charity owns on Deacons Lane in Ely.

The single-storey dwellings, which are set to be finished by Autumn 2021, will replace the current almshouses at Thomas Parsons Square in Ely city centre. The current properties provide charitable accommodation for people in need, over the age of 50 and not in current employment. The decision to relocate residents was made following a long-term review by the Governors of the Charity. They deemed that, because of its Grade II Listed status, sufficient adaptions to Thomas Parsons Square could not be made to the properties to help residents maintain their independence for as long as possible.

The move to Deacons Lane will help to ensure that residents of the almshouses have accommodation which is fit-for-purpose and allows every person to remain in their home for as long as possible. The charity intends to make the move as easy as possible for residents with removal costs paid by the charity, the provision of a parking space for each house, all new white goods to be fitted and supplied and regular communication with every resident on the progress of the build of the new properties.

As receivers for the charity, the Cheffins Rural Professional team has provided strategic advice and is managing the finances throughout this major project. Cheffins also provides ongoing management advice on the Charity's other assets including over 800 acres of agricultural land, allotments and a residential portfolio.

Thomas Parsons Square will continue to be owned by the charity and will remain a feature in Ely city life.

For further information on the Thomas Parsons project, contact the Cheffins Rural Professionals team.

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